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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 02325

CAIRO ALSO FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY MURPHY

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF WEST BEIRUT
FIGHTING

REF: (A) BEIRUT 2279, (B) BEIRUT 2287

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION. FOLLOWING MAJOR FIGHTING ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 16-17, A TENSE CALM NOW PREVAILS IN WEST BEIRUT. SHIITE AMAL MOVEMENT LEADER NABIH BARRI EMERGED AS THE PRIME VICTOR IN THE INTRAMUSLIM FIGHTING. STATEMENTS MADE BY THE VARIOUS LEADERS TRACK WITH OUR ANALYSIS (REFTEL A) THAT THE FIGHTING REFLECTED TWO MAJOR CONFLICTS: LEBANESE SHIA VS. LEBANESE SUNNI AND LEBANESE SHIA VS. PALESTINIANS. THE AMAL MOVEMENT, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE DRUZE PSP AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE "NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT," HAS DEALT A SEVERE BLOW TO THE SUNNI MURABITUN MILITIA AND HAS COME OUT OF THE AFFAIR WITH ITS POSITION AS THE STRONGEST POLITICAL AND MILITARY FORCE IN WEST BEIRUT CONFIRMED AND ENHANCED.

13. THE SYRIAN ROLE REMAINS UNCLEAR, BUT MANY HERE SPECULATE THAT DAMASCUS MUST HAVE CONDONED THE AMAL/PSP MOVE AGAINST THE MURABITUN AND ITS PRO-ARAFAT PALESTINIAN ALLIES AND MAY HAVE, IN FACT, ACTIVELY SUPPORTED THE CLASH.

14. IN HIS RESIGNATION STATEMENT, PRIME MINISTER RASHID KARAMI EXPRESSED DESPAIR OVER THE APRIL 16-17 FIGHTING, POINTED AN ACCUSING FIGURE AT DAMASCUS, AND ASKED FOR SYRIA TO HELP RESOLVE THE ENSUING CRISIS. IT IS TOO SOON TO MAKE ANY FIRM PREDICTIONS AS TO WHO THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER MAY BE OR WHAT FORM THE NEW CABINET MAY TAKE, BUT WE SET FORTH BELOW SOME OF THE RELEVANT FACTORS. END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION.

AMAL, BACKED BY PSP, VICTORIOUS

15. THE DUST IS NOW SETTLING IN WEST BEIRUT AFTER VERY HEAVY FIGHTING OCCURRED ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 16-17, RESULTING IN APPROXIMATELY THIRTY PERSONS KILLED AND ONE HUNDRED WOUNDED. BEIRUT AIRPORT REMAINS OPERATIONAL, AND THE GREEN LINE IS PARTIALLY OPEN, BUT SPORADIC SNIPING CONTINUES IN VARIOUS AREAS OF WEST BEIRUT.

16. IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, STATEMENTS BY KEY LEADERS CONFIRMED OUR EARLIER ANALYSIS THAT THE EVENTS OF APRIL 16-17 REFLECTED A SHIA-SUNNI CONFLICT. THE SHIITE AMAL MILITIA, BACKED BY THE DRUZE PSP, HIT HARD AT THE SUNNI MURABITUN MILITIA, REPORTEDLY TAKING CONTROL OF ALL SIGNIFICANT MURABITUN POSITIONS, INCLUDING THE "VOICE OF ARAB LEBANON" RADIO STATION LOCATED IN THE ABDUL NASR MOSQUE.

¶7. THE REACTION OF SUNNI LEADERS HAS BEEN STRONG. PRIME MINISTER KARAMI RESIGNED (SEE BELOW), AND THE GRAND MUFTI OF THE REPUBLIC, SHEIKH HASSAN KHALID, STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE SHIA FOR STRIKING AGAINST TRADITIONALLY SUNNI WEST BEIRUT. "IT IS INADMISSIBLE FOR BEIRUT TO BE STRUCK AND HUMILIATED AND ITS AUTHORITY SEIZED BY THOSE VERY PEOPLE THAT IT PROTECTED AND WILL CONTINUE TO PROTECT...BY THOSE THAT IT WELCOMED AND HONORED AND WILL CONTINUE TO WELCOME AND HONOR." THE MUFTI ADDED THAT THE SUNNIS WOULD NOT PERMIT THE INHABITANTS OF WEST BEIRUT TO BE "STRUCK AS IF THEY HAD BECOME ISRAELI AGENTS." EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY WITH PRIME MINISTER KARAMI, FORMER PM TAKIADDIN SOLH STRONGLY REGRETTED THE FIGHTING WHICH "OPPOSED PARTIES STRUGGLING FOR A COMMON CAUSE...WHO SHOULD DIRECT THEIR WEAPONS EXCLUSIVELY AGAINST THE ISRAELI ENEMY."

¶8. AMAL LEADER NABIH BARRI RESPONDED VEHEMENTLY TO THE MUFTI'S NOTION THAT THE SHIA WERE GUESTS IN TRADITIONALLY SUNNI WEST BEIRUT. "BEIRUT IS MY CITY AND MY CAPTIAL," HE SAID, "WE WILL NOT ACCEPT CANTONS THAT DEFINE US AS FOREIGNERS WHEN WE ARE PEOPLE OF THE HOUSE." SUPPORTING BARRI'S STATEMENT, THE DRUZE PSP SAID IT "COULD NOT UNDERSTAND...HOW HE (THE MUFTI) COULD QUALIFY CERTAIN RESIDENTS OF WEST BEIRUT (I.E., THE SHIA) AS INTRUDERS. ...THOSE WHO DEFEND WITH THEIR BLOOD THE CAPITAL AGAINST FASCIST-PHALANGE AGRESSION, THOSE WHO STRUGGLE SO THAT BEIRUT WILL REMAIN ARAB AND FREE CANNOT BE CALLED INTRUDERS."

¶9. IN THE SECOND INSTANCE, THE APRIL 16-17 FIGHTING WAS A SHIA-PALESTINIAN SET-TO. THE SHIA, BACKED BY THE DRUZE, STRUCK HARD NOT ONLY AT THE SUNNI MURABITUN BUT ALSO AT THE PRO-ARAFAT PALESTINIANS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MURABITUN. THEIR SUCCESS IN DOING SO, HOWEVER, WAS LESS OVERWHELMING, IN PART BECAUSE THE PALESTINIANS APPARENTLY DID NOT "RISE TO THE BAIT" AND PARTICIPATE IN THE FIGHTING WITH ALL THEIR FORCE. SINCE THE FIGHTING, AMAL AND PSP HAVE REPORTEDLY ESTABLISHED CHECKPOINTS AROUND THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS, TIGHTENING CONTROL OVER THE INFLUX OF ARMS.

¶10. IN A MAJOR PUBLIC STATEMENT, AMAL HIT HARD AT THE PALESTINIANS. BARRI CALLED THE FIGHTING A "NIGHTMARE" IN WHICH HIS AMAL MILITIA CONFRONTED "AN UPRISING CAREFULLY PLANNED BY ARAB HANDS EXPLOITING SECTARIAN IDEAS, FOREIGNERS, INTRUDERS, AND GUESTS IN BEIRUT." BARRI ASKED RHETORICALLY "WHY SOME OUTSIDERS (I.E., THE PALESTINIANS) ARE CONSIDERED AS GUESTS, EVEN IF THEY COME FROM ANOTHER REGION AND ANOTHER CONFESSION, WHILE THE REAL GUESTS IN BEIRUT (I.E., THE SHIA), WHO HAD THE HONOR OF LIBERATING THE CITY FROM THE CHAINS OF MAY 17 AND THE AGENTS OF ISRAEL, ARE NOT WELL LOOKED UPON..."

¶11. ON THE GROUND, THE VICTORS HAVE MOVED TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR GAINS. LEADERS OF AMAL, PSP, AND THE SMALLER MEMBERS OF THE LEFTIST "NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT" (SYRIAN SOCIALIST NATIONAL PARTY, LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY, SYRIAN ARAB BAATH PARTY) MET AT BARRI'S WEST BEIRUT RESIDENCE ON APRIL 17 AND ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF A UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN ORDER IN WEST BEIRUT (A THROW-BACK TO AN IDEA FIRST FIELDIED AFTER THE FEBRUARY 6, 1984, FIGHTING AND DROPPED AFTER STIFF SUNNI RESISTANCE). THIS GROUP PLANS TO SET UP AN OPERATIONS ROOM AND A BUREAU OF CITIZENS AFFAIRS. IT SAYS IT WILL ALSO COMMAND A JOINT "STRIKE FORCE" INITIALLY COMPRISING 300 MEN, TO BE DOUBLED TO 600, DRAWN IN EQUAL NUMBERS FROM AMAL, THE PSP, AND THE JUNIOR MEMBERS OF THE NDF.

ACCORDING TO THE BEIRUT DAILY, "LE REVEIL," WEST BEIRUT NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE BEEN PARCELED OUT AMONG THESE GROUPS. AMAL IS REPORTEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY IN TARIQ AL-JADIDAH, FAKAHANI, MAZRAH, AND KARAKAS; THE PSP IN RAS BEIRUT, HAMRA, AYN AL-MURAYSA, MINAT AL-HISN, MUSAYTIBAH, AND RAWSHAH; AND THE VARIOUS SMALLER GROUPS UNDER THE EGIS OF THE PSP IN SMALL, TOKEN SECTIONS OF TERRITORY.

¶12. NOTABLY ABSENT FROM REPRESENTATION ON THE UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND OR IN THE DIVISION OF SPOILS IS ANY SUNNI MUSLIM GROUP. LACK OF GOL OR LAF PARTICIPATION GOES WITHOUT SAYING. MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, NABIH BARRI HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS THE STRONGMAN OF WEST BEIRUT. THROUGH THE FORMATION OF THE UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND AND THE ANNOUNCED FORMATION OF A "POLITICAL HIGH COMMAND," THE SHIITE AMAL MOVEMENT WITH ITS ALLIES IS CONSOLIDATING AND FORMALIZING ITS CONTROL OF WEST BEIRUT. THIS WILL BE A BITTER PILL FOR THE SUNNI COMMUNITY TO SWALLOW.

SYRIAN ROLE

¶13. THERE AS BEEN MUCH SPECULATION AND LITTLE CONCRETE EVIDENCE CONCERNING THE ROLE THAT SYRIA MAY HAVE PLAYED IN THE APRIL 16-17 FIGHTING. AS WE ANTICIPATED (REFTEL A), THE FACT THAT NABIH BARRI HAD JUST RETURNED FROM DAMACUS BEFORE THE FIGHTING HAS FUELED SPECULATION THAT SYRIA CONDONED AND PERHAPS ACTIVELY SUPPORTED THE MOVE AGAINST THE MURABITUN AND, ESPECIALLY, AGAINST THE PRO-ARAFAT PALESTINIANS. ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF REASONING, SYRIA MAY NEXT UNLEASH AMAL AND THE PSP AGAINST THE PRO-ARAFAT PALESTINIANS IN THE BEIRUT SOUTHERN SUBURBS AND IN SIDON. IN ANY EVENT, SYRIA IS CERTAINLY WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS HERE CLOSELY AND IS APPARENTLY NOT UNHAPPY WITH THE COURSE THEY HAVE TAKEN SO FAR.

¶14. IN HIS RESIGNATION STATEMENT (REFTEL B.), PRIME MINISTER KARAMI EXPRESSED DEEP DESPAIR OVER THE VIOLENCE IN WEST BEIRUT. HE OBLIQUELY BUT CLEARLY BLAMED SYRIA FOR THE "GRAVE AND SERIOUS" EVENTS AND CALLED ON IT TO HELP SORT OUT THE CRISIS. ON APRIL 18, KARAMI DEPARTED FOR DAMASCUS TO MEET WITH SARG LEADERS.

REPLACING THE PRIME MINISTER

¶15. THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS LATEST BATTLE IN WEST BEIRUT WAS TO FORCE THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER KARAMI WHO, CONFRONTED WITH BARRI'S SUCCESSFUL ATTACK ON SUNNI INTERESTS, HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RESIGN. THE SELECTION OF A NEW SUNNI PRIME MINISTER IS SUBJECT TO A NUMBER OF RESTRAINTS. FOREMOST IS THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF ANY SUNNI NOTABLE AGREEING TO REPLACE THE DESPAIRING KARAMI UNDER THE PRESENT CONDITIONS. KARAMI CLEARLY FELT HUMILIATED BY THE EVENTS OF APRIL 16-17; NO SELF-RESPECTING SUNNI WOULD OVERTLY ATTEMPT TO PROFIT BY THE "EFFENDI'S" DISCOMFITURE. SECONDLY, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO PERSUADE A SUNNI LEADER TO PRESIDE OVER A CABINET WITH AN UNREPENTANT BARRI AND JUMBLATT PRESENT. FINALLY, SYRIA'S APPROVAL OF THE NEW PRIME MINISTER WILL BE REQUIRED. NOT KNOWING SYRIA'S EXACT ROLE AND INTENTIONS IN THE EVENTS IN THE WEST, THE PROSPECTIVE SUNNI CANDIDATES WILL BE WARY.

¶16. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE CAN FORESEE ONE FORM WHICH A POSSIBLE SOLUTION MIGHT TAKE. FOR EXAMPLE, A MEETING OF SUNNI RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL NOTABLES AT THE DAR AL-FATWA, THE SEAT OF THE GRAND MUFTI, MIGHT ISSUE A SET OF CONDITIONS THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE MET BEFORE A SUNNI COULD ACCEPT THE

PREMIERSHIP. THIS WOULD ALLOW THE NEW PRIME MINISTER TO CLAIM THE BACKING OF THE SUNNI COMMUNITY FOR NEW TERMS FOR HIS PARTICIPATION, THUS MORE OR LESS TURNING THE PAGE ON KARAMI'S RESIGNATION. WE CANNOT PRECLUDE THAT, UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, KARAMI HIMSELF MIGHT NOT BE REINCARNATED.

¶17. POSSIBLE PRECONDITIONS (APART FROM CONCILIATORY STATEMENTS AND GESTURES FROM AMAL AND THE PSP) INCLUDE AN AGREEMENT THAT BARRI AND JUMBLATT WOULD PARTICIPATE IN CABINET MEETINGS, AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EFFECTIVE SECURITY PLAN FOR THE SUNNI HEARTLANDS OF WEST BEIRUT, SIDON, AND POSSIBLY TRIPOLI. ANY OF THE ABOVE CONCESSIONS WOULD BE HARD TO EXTRACT FROM THE SHIA, WHO ARE RIDING HIGH AT PRESENT. THUS THE CABINET CRISIS MIGHT BECOME A DRAWN-OUT AFFAIR.

FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT

¶18. AS FOR THE FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT, WE SEE TWO PRIMARY OPTIONS. THE FIRST, A SMALL CABINET MUCH LIKE THE OUTGOING "NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT," APPEARS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. BASICALLY THE SAME PERSONALITIES WOULD BE INVOLVED, AND THE SAME ANIMOSITIES WOULD REAPPEAR. IN SUM, THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE KARAMI GOVERNMENT ARE PROBABLY TOO DEEP TO BE SIMPLY PAPERED OVER, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE RISE OF SHIA POWER VIS-A-VIS THEIR SUNNI CORELIGIONISTS. THE SECOND, AN ENLARGED GOVERNMENT, RUMORS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, MIGHT PROVE A MORE FEASIBLE OPTION. IN THIS CASE, WE WOULD POINT OUT THE REPUTATION OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER TAKIADDIN SOLH AS A CONCILIATOR PRESIDING OVER LARGE GOVERNMENTS (THOUGH AGAIN, WE RECALL KARAMI'S PHOENIX-LIKE QUALITIES).

BARTHOLOMEW